



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES I, GUAM (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II), JAPAN, ANCHORAGE (UNITED STATES OF AMERICA II)  
(FEBRUARY 16-27, 1981)

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE JAPANESE BISHOPS**

*Apostolic Nunciature of Tokyo*  
*Monday, 23 February 1981*

*Dear Brothers in Christ,*

1. It gives me deep joy to come to your country on the occasion of the Beatification of your Japanese martyrs. These holy martyrs take their place, alongside the many others that the Church already honors officially, to testify to the glorious Christian history of your people, in which the blood of martyrs has truly become the seed of Christians. I am looking forward to having the opportunity to honor these martyrs in a solemn way in Nagasaki. Meanwhile the important event of their Beatification gives me this occasion to make a pastoral visit to the Church in Japan—the occasion to meet all categories of the faithful and *the special joy of being with you*, the Pastors of the flock.

2. I have come here to offer you my *fraternal support for your mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ* to the "pusillus grex" of Japan and to anyone who may freely wish to listen to the Gospel message. I have come so that we may express together our unity in Christ and in his Church, that you may be reinforced in this unity, and that in the strength of this unity you may proceed with new vigor to face the challenges of your pastoral mission.

When, as Successors of the Apostles, as Bishops of the Church of God and as servants of the Gospel, we listen attentively, we can hear the same cry that was addressed to the Apostle Philip : "We wish to see Jesus"<sup>[1]</sup>. And today, does not this cry resound throughout the teeming

metropolis of Tokyo and throughout all Japan? And is it not addressed in a particular way to you, the Bishops of Japan?

3. Dear Brothers, *the Father wills to continue to manifest his beloved Son through our pastoral ministry*. He wants to manifest him as the loving and merciful Savior of the world, the Teacher of humanity, the perfect Son of Man and the eternal Son of God. At the same time the Father wills that all people may have life in his Son, and through him share in the life of the Most Holy Trinity. Our response to this plan of the Father is expressed in the programs of evangelization and catechesis, whereby we perseveringly proclaim Christ, and methodically endeavor to lead our people to the full appreciation of their Catholic faith and to full maturity in Christ.

4. In order to show Christ to the world, in order to build up the community of the Church, we ourselves must be able to say with Saint John : "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ"[2]. *This unity must be maintained in all its ecclesial dimensions*, including communion with the universal Church.

This unity requires from Bishops the *collegialitas effectiva* and the *collegialitas affectiva* with the Successor of Peter and with all their brother Bishops throughout the world. It likewise requires a special manifestation of unity among the Bishops of each Episcopal Conference. This latter dimension is of particular importance for the effect that it has on all local apostolic endeavors.

But above all, unity belongs to the mystery of the Church, and its value was deeply understood in the early Christian community, where the believers were "of one heart and soul"[3]. From the beginning, the Bishops of Christ's Church have held—and they still hold—special responsibility for the unity of the Church, with a serious obligation to be united among themselves. Saint Paul's words of apostolic injunction have a personal meaning for every Bishop and group of Bishops : "I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment"[4].

5. The expression of this close unity in *fraternal collaboration* is required *for your pastoral programs*. It is a condition for their successful coordination and for their effectiveness. In this way I urge you to do everything possible to find strength in unity, in order to promote common pastoral initiatives in evangelization and catechesis. Continue, dear Brothers, in the same zeal that has already sustained hard work in the areas of the common translation of the Bible, the publication of the new Missal, the compilation of a new catechism and the translation of the documents of the Magisterium.

And there are many more pastoral issues that will require the full measure of your common commitment for the welfare of the Church in Japan. The fraternal collaboration of all the Bishops among themselves in fulfilling the directives and genuine spirit of the Second Vatican Council, as

well as the postconciliar norms issued by the Apostolic See, is indeed an act of pastoral love for the people.

6. Like the whole Church, you feel the *urgent need for giving continuing catechesis to your people*. I am sure that you will make every effort to see that no category of the faithful is neglected.

In my [Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis](#), I spoke to all the Bishops of the Church in the following terms : "I know that your ministry as Bishops is growing daily more complex and overwhelming. A thousand duties call you ... But let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way. This concern will lead you to transmit personally to your faithful the doctrine of life. But it should also lead you to take on in your diocese, in accordance with the plans of the Episcopal Conference to which you belong, the chief management of catechesis, while at the same time surrounding yourselves with competent and trustworthy assistants. Your principal role will be to bring about and maintain a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization ... You can be sure that *if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do*. And needless to say, although your zeal must sometimes impose upon you the thankless task of denouncing deviations and correcting errors, it will much more often win for you the joy and consolation of seeing your Churches flourishing because catechesis is given in them as the Lord wishes"[5].

One of the areas worthy of special pastoral zeal is the need to catechize the young people in *preparation for marriage*. This need is all the more pressing for those who will be endeavoring to live upright lives with marriage partners who do not have the same faith or the same religious convictions. Efforts made in this field can do much to foster the sanctity of marriage and the family. In all catechetical endeavors it will be necessary to proclaim clearly the teaching of Christ and his Church. Catechesis should never doubt the power of Christ's grace to lead the faithful to high degrees of Christian holiness.

7. As Bishops, we must be convinced of the need *never to lower the standards of Christian living* that we present to our people. Our pastoral responsibility urges us to propose a deep acceptance of the Beatitudes, a radical commitment to evangelical values. Our people, redeemed and sanctified by the blood of the Savior, are capable of accepting the divine invitation that it falls to us to transmit. Over and over again Japanese Catholics have proved that they are able to maintain their cultural heritage, while making incarnate in it the original element of Christianity, that newness of life in Christ. They have shown an understanding of the doctrine of the Cross and of the universal vocation to holiness. It is necessary to keep alive the memory of your martyrs so that your people will always know that it is their heritage to glory "in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"[6].

8. Supremely worthy of intense united efforts on your part is the *apostolate of vocations*. By God's grace a high percentage of Catholic women have embraced the religious life. But the Gospel still

has need of many witnesses. It is important that young people be given the opportunity to hear Christ's call. And many of the young people, once they have heard and seen Jesus, will want to follow him.

The *promoting and obtaining of vocations* by prayer and effort is followed by two other dynamic aspects : careful attention to the proper formation of those who have accepted God's call, and the rightful employment of priestly and religious talents.

The major seminaries, in particular, should be the object of the Bishops' deepest pastoral interest, so that the priorities of the priesthood will be appreciated long before ordination. For all of us—and it is worth repeating time and time again—the apostolic priorities of the priesthood are "prayer and the ministry of the word"[7]. To sustain your priests in these activities is to promote Christ's plan for his Body, the Church. Of all the members of the flock, none have more right to your fraternal love than the priests who are your partners in the Gospel of salvation : your own diocesan priests and the missionaries who serve generously by your side. Your kindness, your interest, your personal concern for them as friends constitute a salutary example for them in their own relationship with the rest of God's people.

9. In my first [Encyclical](#) I devoted rather lengthy sections to two vital aspects of the Church's life : the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. I have repeatedly emphasized the great power of these sacraments in regard to Christian living.

And today I would encourage you personally to do everything in your power to help the ecclesial community to appreciate fully *the value of individual confession* as a personal encounter with the merciful and loving Savior, and to be faithful to the directives of the Church in a matter of such importance. The norms of the Apostolic See in regard to the altogether exceptional use of general absolution also take into account "a right on Christ's part with regard to every human being redeemed by him"[8].

10. Your own ministry and that of your priests, as well as the whole activity of the universal Church, reaches its culmination in *the Eucharistic Sacrifice. Here the proclamation of Jesus Christ is complete*. Here evangelization finds its source and summit[9]. Here our unity in Christ finds its fullest expression. With what joy I look forward to celebrating the Eucharist in your midst three times in the next three days, offering up to the Father, in union with Jesus Christ, all the hopes and aspirations, all the joys and sorrows of the Japanese people, praying "that the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph, as it did among you"[10].

11. Let us continue then, dear Brothers, despite obstacles and setbacks, despite human weakness, to offer the Gospel freely and in its entirety. It is our contribution in the face of the loneliness of the world, it is our answer to the selfishness of man, to the lack of meaning that many people find in life, to the temptation to escapism, to lethargy and discouragement. As ministers of

Christ we offer his word and the tender love of his Sacred Heart: it is our original and specific contribution to the dialogue of salvation, to the promotion of human dignity and to the final liberation of humanity.

In the name of Jesus let us go forth confidently, and in the name of Mary let us rejoice. Saint Paul Miki and his companion martyrs understood the meaning of these names and their gentle power. And may this heritage long remain in Japan : to lead future generations *to Jesus through Mary*.

Dear Brothers : thank you for your invitation to come to Japan. Thank you for your own fraternal support and for your partnership in the Gospel. "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen" [11].

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[1] *Jn* 12:21.

[2] *1 Jn* 1:3.

[3] *Acts* 4:32.

[4] *1 Cor* 1:10.

[5] *Catechesi Tradendae*, 63.

[6] *Gal* 6:14.

[7] *Acts* 6:4.

[8] *Redemptor Hominis*, 20.

[9] Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

[10] *2 Thess* 3:1.

[11] *1 Cor* 16:24.

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